

Performance Stress and Relaxation

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Mindfulness

Definitions:

1. Paying attention to the present moment, on purpose, non-judgmentally
2. Allowing things (thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, stories about yourself, anything you can see, hear, touch, taste, or smell, inside your body or outside your body) to be just as they are, not fighting or struggling with, not holding onto, just noticing

Basic instruction:

1. Notice X (observe, pay attention to, focus on, awareness to)
2. Let go of your thoughts
3. Let your feelings be

Mindfulness Meditation

(*Buddha's Brain*, by Dr. Rick Hanson, pp. 86-87)

Find a comfortable place where you can focus and you won't be disturbed. It's fine to meditate while standing, walking, or lying down, but most people do so while sitting on a chair or cushion. Find a posture that is both relaxed and alert, with your spine reasonably straight. As the Zen saying suggests, you should handle your mind like the skillful rider of a horse, with neither too tight nor too loose a rein.

Meditate for as long as you like. You can start with shorter periods, even just five minutes. Longer sittings, from thirty to sixty minutes, will usually help you go deeper. You can decide how long you're going to meditate at the outset or play it by ear. It's all right to glance at a clock during the meditation. Alternately, you could set a timer. Some people light a stick of incense—when it's finished, they are, too. Feel free to modify the suggestions that follow.

Take a big breath and relax, with your eyes open or closed. Be aware of sounds coming and going, and let them be whatever they are. Know that you are taking this time to meditate. You can drop all other concerns during this period, like setting down a heavy bag before plopping into a comfortable chair. After the meditation, you can pick those concerns up again—if you want to!

Bring your awareness to the sensations of breathing. Don't try to control the breath; let it be whatever it is. Sense the cool air coming in and warm air going out. The chest and belly rising and falling.

Try to stay with the sensations of each breath from the beginning to end. You may want to softly count your breaths—count to ten and then start over; go back to one if your mind wanders—or note them quietly to yourself as “in” and “out.” It's normal for the mind to wander, and when it does, just return to the breath. Be gentle and kind with yourself. See if you can stay attentive to ten breaths in a row (usually a challenge at first). After your mind settles down during the first minutes of the meditation, explore becoming increasingly absorbed in the breath and letting go of everything else. Open to the simple pleasures of breathing, given over to the breath. With some practice, see if you can stay present with the breath for dozens of breaths in a row.

Using the breath as a kind of anchor, be aware of whatever else is moving through the mind. Aware of thoughts and feelings, wishes and plans, images and memories—all coming and going. Let them be what they are; don't get caught up in them; don't struggle with or get fascinated by them. Have a sense of acceptance—even kindness—toward whatever passes through the open space of awareness.

Keep settling into the breath, perhaps with a growing sense of peacefulness. Be aware of the changing nature of what passes through the mind. Notice how it feels to get caught up in the passing contents of awareness—and how it feels to let them go by. Be aware of peaceful, spacious awareness itself.

When you like, bring the meditation to an end. Notice how you feel, and take in the good of your meditation.

Visualization or Mental Rehearsal

1. In a quiet comfortable place, relax using abdominal breathing
2. Get a picture of a performance situation (and place if you know it) in your mind's eye
3. Involve as many of your senses as you can so the experience feels as real and vivid as possible
4. Imagine yourself performing just as you would like; hear, see, feel
5. If you make mistakes, just observe, stop and go back before the mistake as though you were rewinding a VCR tape
6. Repeat this process moving at a slower pace at first until you feel secure, then resume normal pace
7. Break up the situation into smaller parts and use one or more in each session of visualization

Creating an Imaginary Mental Boundary to Filter Out Distractions

1. Create an imaginary circle, sphere, cone, cylinder, force field, etc., which you will take with you and place around yourself as you are performing
2. This imaginary mental boundary will shield and protect you from distractions of all kinds which may undermine your concentration
3. It is a space where you feel safe and secure and into which no person or thing can come without your permission
4. Visualize distractions simply bouncing off your boundary which your sound, expression, and image flow out uninhibited
5. Practice using your boundary by setting up distracting situations as you practice

Systematic Desensitization

1. Create a hierarchy of stressful performing situations, list from least to most
2. Create a list of coping statements
3. Relax using abdominal breathing
4. Imagine/visualize least stressful situation
5. Continue to relax and use coping statements as you hold situation in your mind
6. Repeat until situation no longer produces anxiety or feelings of discomfort and you are successful
7. Move on to next situation on your list

Set up same performance situation in real life:

1. Relax using abdominal breathing
2. Continue to relax and use coping statements before beginning to perform
3. Focus and perform
4. Repeat until situation no longer produces anxiety or feelings of discomfort and you are successful
5. Move on to next situation on your list

Recommended Reading:

1. Antony, M.M. (2004). *10 simple solutions to shyness*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.
2. Ashley, J. (1996). *Overcoming stage fright in everyday life*. New York: Clarkson Potter.
3. Bruser, M. (1997). *The art of practicing: a guide to making music from the heart*. New York: Bell Tower.
4. Esposito, J.E. (2003). *In the spotlight*. Bridgewater, Connecticut: In the SpotLight, LLC.
5. Farnbach, R., & Farnbach, E. (2001). *Overcoming performance anxiety*. East Roseville: Simon & Schuster.
6. Gallwey, T. (1982). *The inner game of tennis*. Toronto: Bantam Books.
7. Goode, M.I. (2003). *Stage fright in music performance and its relationship to the unconscious*. Oak Park: Trumpetworks Press.
8. Green, B., & Gallwey, T. (1986). *The inner game of music*. Garden City: Anchor Press.
9. Greene, D. (2001). *Audition success*. New York: Routledge.
10. Greene, D. (2001) *Fight your fear and win*. New York: Broadway Books.
11. Grindea, C., ed. (1991). *Tensions in the performance of music*. London: Kahn & Averill.
12. Hanson, R. (2009). *Buddha's brain*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.
13. Hayes, S.C., & Smith, S. (2005). *Get out of your mind and into your life*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.
14. Maisel, E. (2005). *Performance anxiety*. New York: Back Stage Books.
15. Ristad, H. (1982). *A soprano on her head*. Moab: Real People Press.